

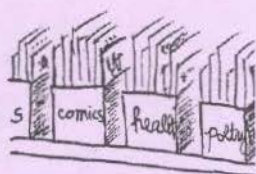
DIY



ZINE



LIBRARIES



by *cheyenne*
neckmonster

Prologue:

Why Write a Zine About Zine Libraries?

DIY libraries have always intrigued me. When I was first getting involved in the punk scene, in my mid-teens, I had the great luck of meeting some folks who were into zines. I staffed for a zine briefly, and then helped the folks who ran the zine to start a community center. In the community center, there was a lending library and zine collection.

The zine collection opened up a world to me that I hadn't known existed: that lots of people, all over the world, were making these things. I wanted to know about all of them; or at least know their scope-- there were zines about health, travel, cooking, personal stories, collections of art and photographs, ephemera, clip art, feminism, punk rock, how to make stuff and do things, the list went on and on.

I was in love. Anyone could make a zine about anything, and some of them were housed in our little collection. During my subsequent travels, I visited a few zine libraries, met a lot of folks with distros, and got more enmeshed in the zine scene, such as it is.

When I left for college, I moved away from the community center and its library. About two years later, I heard that someone had put all the zines that weren't about anarchy in the recycling bin.

I have interviewed as many DIY zine archives & libraries as I could find (and who would answer my questions). From their interviews, I've constructed this guide. I am making it because I have a personal passion for zines and for libraries. (This zine is, in part, an attempt to get an idea of how other zine libraries started up and how they are maintained. Though many universities and some public libraries have zine collections, I'm interested in DIY zine libraries, archives & collections.

Hopefully someone who wants to start a zine library will read this, get inspired, and start a collection somewhere-- and, with any luck, the collection won't find its way to the recycling bin, or remain sequestered in boxes in a basement somewhere.

-Cheyenne





Part One:

Getting a Zine Library Started

Just as it's possible to create a zine out of whatever material you want, on whatever topic you choose, it's also possible to make a zine library or collection pretty much however you want it to be. There are some conventions of zine libraries/archives that I've noticed in my experience with them, but there are always variations and new ideas. Some zine libraries are mobile, some are online, and some are on shelves. What defines a zine library is open for interpretation.

Libraries sometimes change over the course of their existence, based on who is involved:

"There have been several different librarians and each one of them had specific interests that built the library in different ways over the years." -Alex, Independent Publishing Resource Center

Though it's possible to open a zine library or archive on one's own, everyone in my interviews told me that things go much smoother when you can share the work. It can be a massive project to start a library, and the duties involved – cataloguing, organizing, housing the library or archive, staffing & maintaining a space – can easily get overwhelming for even a small collective of folks, depending on how large the library collection is, and how much you want to do with it.

Some zine libraries are in residential spaces, or locations that are shared with other organizations:

"The DZL is housed within the 27 Social Centre, which houses several other projects. There are monthly general assembly meetings for the 27 Social Centre with representatives from each project in order to make decisions about the entire space." -Kelly, Denver Zine Library

Sometimes, there are other people in your area who also want to start a zine library or archive. If there are any local distros, infoshops, or zine-writers, they might be interested in helping out, getting involved, or donating materials to the collection. Desire to open a zine library may grow out of a massive personal collection that can be shared with a broader public:

"[Sonia and I, the founders] thought that Halifax needed an open public space in which folks could meet and work on projects. We both had made zines for years and had amassed big collections, so a zine library was a perfect project." -Sarah, Anchor Archive

It's good to have an idea of what the purpose of your zine library or archive is. It might just be to make resources available to a local community-- or to preserve materials from a certain geographic location, subculture, or time period:

"We were part of the organizing collective for Queeruption 3 in the Bay Area in 2001. We realized that a lot of questions that kept coming up about gender, sex, sexuality, etc. had been addressed in the queer zines that we had read and collected. We decided that the best way to share this knowledge was to create a digital archive of scanned queer zines so that they could be accessed from anywhere." -Milo, Queer Zine Archive Project

If a statement of purpose, mission, or shared vision/points of unity are being developed, it may be useful to consider the ways in which affiliating a project with a particular line of thinking, political alignment, or other label may alienate users or create borders rather than bridges to community:

"With a project like a space, I just think it's more important to just keep ourselves running in a cooperative and anti oppressive fashion and keep availing our resources to our communities and the broader public." -Adrienne, Papercut Zine Library

Other groups find that self-identification is important to the group, and to the library itself. If a particular genre or subject is the primary focus of the collection, that may be something worthwhile to state publicly, so you don't end up getting a bunch of zines that don't fit in with the mission or goals of the project.

"The mission of the Queer Zine Archive Project (QZAP) is to establish a "living history" archive of past and present queer zines and to encourage current and emerging zine publishers to continue to create. In curating such a unique aspect of culture, we value a collectivist approach that respects the diversity of experiences that fall under the heading "queer."

The primary function of QZAP is to provide a free on-line searchable database of the collection with links allowing users to download electronic copies of zines. By providing access to the historical canon of queer zines we hope to make them more accessible to diverse communities and reach wider audiences."

-QZAP Mission Statement

As with any other aspect of a zine library, do what fits best for the project. Articulate specifications if necessary.

"Our collection is pretty much wide open - we'll take donations of any kind of zine, as long as the content isn't racist/homophobic/sexist/etc. We have everything from poetry zines to music zines to zines about starting pirate radio stations."

-Ericka, Flywheel Arts Collective



Part Two:

Open Hours and Circulation Policies



Though every library is different, there are commonalities throughout all zine libraries: they all aim to make zines accessible to folks who 1) wouldn't know about them otherwise; 2) couldn't afford them otherwise; or 3) couldn't find them otherwise.

In order to do this, some libraries have open hours in which folks can come in and use the collection, or check out zines. At physical locations, there are generally a few folks who will share the responsibility of being around for open hours, or users can make appointments to visit the collection.

Zine libraries may have borrower cards, or a more informal checkout procedure, ranging from signing names and the zines borrowed in a notebook to being entered into a database to keep track of items checked out and their due dates.

“It was really important to me that it be a circulating collection, so yes, everything is up for check out and people can borrow items for three weeks.” -Lacey, Zine Apothecary

“Once someone visits the DZL 3 times, they're able to borrow up to 5 zines for up to 3 weeks.” -Kelly, Denver Zine Library

If zines are getting checked out, some of them are likely to be lost or damaged during checkout periods. However, on the whole, zine libraries report that items that circulate generally get returned to them. With circulating zines, it might be possible to determine who has a missing copy of a zine, as well.



"On the whole, things come back. Sometimes they don't, which is a grievous misfortune, but I don't think we'd like ourselves, or that people would like us, if we didn't circulate." -Adrienne, Papercut

Zine Library

"This dude, Sweet tooth, borrowed some old copies of Dreamwhip and didn't bring them back so we set the word out to the punx and he got harassed for being a zine stealer!" -Alex, Independent Publishing Resource Center

Each zine library has its own system for keeping track of checkout and circulation. Some places keep a notebook for signing items in and out, others have a filing system or a digital catalogue.

"The system that we had, was basically.. things were organized by topic in boxes for browsing, and people signed them out using recipe cards, so yeah, I mean, it worked fine, but it could be improved." -Amanda, Anchor Archive

Depending on the resources, time, and people available to organize the collection and keep track of it, libraries vary in their open hours and checkout policies. Other projects such as zine-mobiles and online collections have different priorities, goals, and availability based on the nature of the project.





Part Three:

Staffing a Zine Library or Archive

Zine archives and libraries, like many grassroots organizations, experience an ebb and flow of volunteers, interest, and energy. Those who are dedicated to projects may have to take breaks, move away, or otherwise suspend their involvement. Sometimes, a library has to move to a new location or push to get funding – having a variety of people, with different interests and skills, is a good way to keep your project sustained.

Zine libraries are generally volunteer-run. Depending on the type of space they're housed in and the goals of the library, it may double as a meeting space, venue, and, if there's room, a workshop space for artists and writers who wish to make their own zines.

Getting & retaining volunteers can be a challenge. Some zine libraries have work parties or potlucks for volunteers, to foster friendship and build community. Certain libraries and archives host zine tours or have programs such as residencies or internships to keep things interesting. Overall, a sense of community and service tends to hold these organizations together.

"By actively recruiting collective members, we insure that the momentum of the Project is always there and our non-hierarchical collectivism helps to guarantee that the burden for keeping QZAP up and running doesn't fall to just one or two individuals." -Milo, Queer Zine Archive Project

"People want to help us and be part of this because they love what we have, what we are, and what we do." -Adrienne, Papercut Zine Library

Whether a library is collectively run or a one-person show, there may be unforeseen circumstances (that often lead to good stories afterwards):

"Our unofficial mascot is a squirrel. But with all the staff turnover, it wasn't until recent months that our present staffers learned why. Someone who was around for the genesis of the library resurfaced for a second stint as a librarian... they told of an early day at the Harvard location. They were the librarian on shift that day and their boyfriend was visiting and, um, an actual squirrel emerged from behind the sofa and BIT the boyfriend." -Adrienne, Papercut Zine Library



ula to gather up any extra ink and return
ink container. Take your screen and any
with ink on them into the darkroom and
with the garden sprayer, taking care to
ink out of your screen. Put everything
Wipe up any ink on the printing table,
y the tape registration marks.

Part Four: Organizing, Preserving & Cataloguing a Zine Collection

Most zine collections are organized in some fashion, so that things can be located easily, and people looking for specific types of zines can browse the collection.



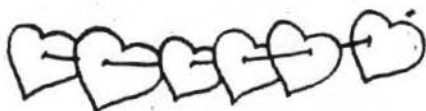
"The fields [for our online catalogue] were largely modelled after what was recommended in Julie Bartel's extremely useful book *From A to Zine*." -Amanda, Anchor Archive

"Zines are in a loose alphabetical order, with magazine boxes for each letter of the alphabet. For zines where we have more extensive runs (like Maximum Rock & Roll), we have boxes devoted to those specific zine titles. We also have a small box (that originally held clementines!) for miscellaneous small zines that might get lost in the larger boxes." -Erika, Flywheel Arts Collective

Catalogues used to be on index cards, organized by author, subject, and call number. However, most zine libraries (and other types of libraries) now use databases to manage their collections, if they choose to have a digital catalogue, but generally use similar means of organizing collections:

"[We organize zines] generally alpha by title, especially online. Also we have several dedicated collections named by donors." -Milo, Queer Zine Archive Project

"Amanda Stevens and Zac Howarth did a directed study project when they were doing a MLIS at Dalhousie and designed our catalogue system and website. They are still around and doing super awesome work! Lots more folks have come through the zine library over the years, library students or artists or activists or whoever. They get involved mainly when they visit the space and then start to help out." -Sarah, Anchor Archive



Preserving a collection may be important to your library; it might not. QZAP stores its zines in mylar bags, filed into filing cabinets organized alphabetically by title. Others organize zines in magazine holders, on bookshelves, or in display racks. The way zines are shelved or organized may be dictated by the size and type of the collection.

Some collections are catalogued on devoted zine library webpages, in spreadsheets or databases on computers at the libraries themselves, or on larger sites such as librarything.com, which are searchable from anywhere.

A few libraries have made their organizational methods, categories for shelving, and taxonomies available online. Others have pictures of their facilities, which can give a good idea of how their shelves are organized and zines are stored, if you're looking for inspiration.

tax.on.om.y (noun): the branch of science concerned with classification.

If a zine gets worn out, it is sometimes possible to order a new copy from a distro, get a replacement from the author, or make a new copy.

Maintaining the collection depends on the priorities of the organization. If a collection is intended to be preserved indefinitely, it may be a good idea to keep sunlight, intense heat and cold, and moisture away from the collection. Even in-house use of zines can wear on them, depending on how much use they get (especially newsprint zines), and in what condition they were in at the time of donation.



"Well, [the collection has] somehow survived punk shows with beer all around, sitting in a basement for years, moving three times, being housed in an ice shack/shanty, and now being housed in a garage while parts of the collection travel the country in a van. So it's definitely a used collection... They're pretty tough." -Lacey, Zine Apothecary

Some zines, such as art zines, screenprinted materials, and cloth zines might require different care.

"[Our collection has] some unusual, difficult to categorize items, the easiest to describe being one that is etched in glass, bound with pipe cleaner." -Adrienne, Papercut Zine Library



Part Five: Funding a Zine Library or Archive



Fundraising is a challenge for most zine libraries. Sometimes, zine libraries run their own distros and get some revenue from sales.

Some libraries are part of larger projects or community spaces that charge only a fraction of the rent for the whole space, or that offer more than just a reading room, and take membership dues or other fees to help defray costs.

"Our annual event is a silent auction in the fall and generally raises a good portion of our budget for the year (which at this point is almost exclusively rent). Besides events, we had created three calendars with art from local zinesters/comic artists. This wasn't a huge moneymaker for the amount of time we were investing, so we put this on hold until we're able to plan some other successful fundraising options. We currently have tote bags for sale that are screenprinted with the DZL logo and original artwork." -Kelly, Denver Zine Library

"[QQZAP is funded] mostly out of pocket, also by selling zines and t-shirts online and at zine fests. We've had a couple of benefactors over the years, and we've gotten a little grant money, too." -Milo, Queer Zine Archive Project



"We tried raising \$5,000 recently, as that would keep us operating for a full year, but only managed to extract a bit more than \$3,000 from our supporters. We did manage to secure a grant from the Somerville Arts Council, but grants are almost exclusively project-based, rather than for rent-paying and space-keeping." -Adrienne, Papercut Zine Library

"We host benefit concerts, flea markets & other events to raise money for Flywheel. We also accept donations from community members & local businesses who are interested in sustaining non-profit, community-minded arts projects in the area." -Ericka, Flywheel Arts Collective

Every zine library is unique. Each has its own way of dealing with problems, paying rent, and making its collection available. Thanks for reading, and best of luck in any zine-related endeavors you may have in the future!



ANCHOR ARCHIVE
Halifax, Nova Scotia
Established 2005
4 librarians
4,000+ items

Epilogue:
Thanks & Credits!

DENVER ZINE LIBRARY
Denver, Colorado
Established 2003
2-5 librarians
10,000+ zines

INDEPENDENT PUBLISHING RESOURCE CENTER

Portland, Oregon

Established 1998

1 librarian, 15 volunteers

6,000+ zines

FLYWHEEL ARTS COLLECTIVE

Easthampton, Massachusetts

Established 1999

5 on Zine Committee

1,000+ items

PAPERCUT ZINE LIBRARY
Somerville, Massachusetts

Established 2005

5 librarians

14,000+ items, including zines, books and audiovisual materials

THE QUEER ZINE ARCHIVE PROJECT

Milwaukee, Wisconsin

Established 2003

6-8 librarians

1,200+ items: zines & print ephemera

ZINE APOTHECARY
Minneapolis, Minnesota
Established 2011

1 librarian

1,600+ items

*apologies to those
i could not include
due to time constraints!*

thanks, y' all!

The Anchor Archive, Bike Again, Value Village, Amanda, Elise, Hugh, Matthew, Molly, Nic, Nicole, & Terissa at Roberts Street, harmless spiders, hot showers, Paul – Captain of the Haligonian III, and faraway friends who kept me company when everyone else here was asleep.

Done during a two-week residency at the Roberts Street Social Centre in Halifax, Nova Scotia. June 20-July 3 2011.

Do you love zine libraries too? Get in touch!
neck.monster@gmail.com

